UNITED
NATIONS

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General Assembly
Security Council

Distr.
GENERAL

A/54/618
S/1999/1174
16 November 1999

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

GENERAL ASSEMBLY
Fifty-fourth session
Agenda items 63 and 116 (b)
QUESTION OF CYPRUS
HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS: HUMAN RIGHTS QUESTIONS, INCLUDING ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES FOR IMPROVING THE EFFECTIVE ENJOYMENT OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS

SECURITY COUNCIL
Fifty-fourth year

Letter dated 15 November 1999 from the Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to transmit herewith a letter dated 15 November 1999, addressed to you by His Excellency Mr. Aytuğ Plümer, Representative of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (see annex).

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter and its annex would be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 63 and 116 (b), and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Volkan VURAL
Ambassador
Permanent Representative

99-35084 (E) 221199

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Annex

Letter dated 15 November 1999 from Mr. Aytuğ Plümer addressed to the Secretary-General

I have the honour to refer to your note transmitting the interim report of the Special Rapporteur of the Commission on Human Rights on the question of religious intolerance, dated 23 September 1999 (A/54/386), in particular to its paragraph 52, and to bring the following to your attention.

It is regrettable that unfounded allegations of the Greek Cypriot side such as the so-called "policy of intolerance and religious discrimination" and the so-called "acts of vandalism" against churches in the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus have been deemed credible to be included in the above-mentioned report.

Intolerance and religious discrimination have been and continue to be part and parcel of the long-standing policy of enmity pursued by the Greek Cypriot administration towards the Turkish Cypriot people. It has been the Greek Cypriot side that has systematically tried to destroy the Turkish Muslim heritage of Cyprus, in particular during the ethnic cleansing campaign between 1963 and 1974. Throughout this period, historical and religious monuments in Cyprus, including 103 mosques and Muslim shrines, have been destroyed as a result of attacks by Greek Cypriots.

Even today, the Greek Cypriot side continues to show utter contempt for the remaining Turkish Islamic heritage in South Cyprus. Ottoman Turkish shrines in South Cyprus are under threat of disintegration due to total neglect on the part of the Greek Cypriot authorities. This has been confirmed by a recent report published in the Greek Cypriot daily Haravgi, dated 10 October 1999. This special issue concerning the town of Paphos in South Cyprus reports that mosques, cemeteries and cultural monuments belonging to the Turkish heritage have been abandoned to their fate and damaged over time owing to the lack of any measures by Greek Cypriot authorities. The newspaper further notes that, "We have to concede that all these monuments have been left to the mercy of the passage of time ... No planning whatsoever has been made for any repairs or maintenance. We have to change our mentality and above all show sensitivity towards monuments belonging to other faiths".

Unfortunately, the mentality that created the Cyprus problem in 1963 persists even today. On 29 August 1999 the Hala Sultan Tekke Mosque in South Cyprus, which is one of the most sacred Islamic shrines for the entire Islamic world, has been the target of an arson attack, resulting in considerable damage to the shrine. We have strongly condemned this abominable act and called upon the Greek Cypriot authorities to take immediate measures to prevent such incidents in the future.

In contrast to the above-mentioned harmful policies of the Greek Cypriot side, the policy of the Government of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus is to protect the cultural heritage within its territory irrespective of its religious and cultural origins. In view of the illegal and inhuman blockade by

the Greek Cypriot side of any international assistance to the Turkish Cypriot side, our Department of Antiquities works diligently to realize the objective of preserving cultural sites with limited internal resources. In this context, I wish to underline that preservation of historical sites through reuse is carried out in accordance with international instruments governing the preservation of cultural heritage.

As for allegations of "intolerance" and "religious discrimination", I would like to refer to a recent report published in the Greek Cypriot daily Filelefttheros, dated 3 November 1999, which states that racism among the Greek Cypriot community is a serious problem that has grown over time. The paper reports the following: "Foreigners working in [South] Cyprus and six human rights organizations are holding [on Sunday] a demonstration in order to draw attention to the dangers of discrimination and to contribute towards efforts to achieve integration of foreigners into the community".

Turkish Cypriots living in South Cyprus have long been subjected to severe harassment and discrimination by the Greek Cypriot administration. The Greek Cypriot police are known to restrict the freedom of movement of Turkish Cypriots in the South for surveillance purposes. Incidents of illegal detention, torture and forcible expulsion of Turkish Cypriots in South Cyprus over the years have demonstrated the extent of the prevalent intolerance and hostility towards Turkish Cypriots. A number of victims of such actions have filed complaints with the European Commission of Human Rights (Council of Europe).

In view of the foregoing, and in the face of the overwhelming evidence of religious intolerance and discrimination in South Cyprus, it is incumbent upon the international community to strongly urge the Greek Cypriot side to assume responsibility for all its actions, past and present, and to cease forthwith its campaign of misinformation and propaganda aimed at defaming the Turkish Cypriot side. An administration whose actions belie stated beliefs or defy common principles should not be allowed to mislead the world any longer.

I should be grateful if the text of the present letter could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly, under agenda items 63 and 116 (b), and of the Security Council.

(Signed) Aytuğ PLÜMER
Representative
Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus